

Contributions

SATAN'S THEORY OF HUMAN CONDUCT

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Perhaps the secret of satan's power over men lies in his exact knowledge of human nature. "Doth Job fear God for naught?" It cannot be denied that in a vast multitude of human actions, self interest lurks in the secret motive, and it is also a melancholy fact that men in every calling, even the most sacred and holy, prostitute religion, benevolence, patriotism, charity, and every exalted sentiment to the basest ends of self aggrandizement and self glorification. These self seekers, these people who are "in it for what it will pay" are found in politics, in legislative halls, in all organized charities, in pew and in pulpit. The slime of their trail defiles the very temple of God, and there is nothing too sacred or too holy if it can only be "worked" in their interest.

Now satan uses this extremely obvious tendency of the corrupt human heart to discredit all virtue. He would have us to believe that every man has his price, that wherever virtue is practiced, it is for her social, commercial or reputational rewards, that disinterestedness is a pretense or an illusion, that men do handsome things for the advertisement it gives them, that Job sticks to his integrity because he makes a good thing out of it. This spirit of detraction is as much a characteristic of human nature as it is of the satanic. We see a man standing higher than ourselves, and we commence to pull him down. He is overrated; his superiority is merely adventitious; that eloquent preacher who borrows his sermons is seeking popularity, or looking out for the big salary; that active church member will cheat you at a bargain; they are all looking out for number one. How universal is this contemptible aptitude of the human heart to attribute low motives to everybody, even the most eminent in charity and good works. Yes, he is a good man, but, but, but, and as Sam Jones said they keep on butting him until they butt him off the log and drown him in the deep sea of damnable lies.

Detraction has always been the price of eminence in any of the higher walks of life, or in any acquisition of personal excellence. Do you climb up to the summit of some serene, high hill of victory and power, whether it be as a patriot, a Christian, a man, and immediately some devil fish of detraction will reach up its long, slimy tentacles and endeavor to drag you down. If heaven and hell are in sight of each other, perhaps the keenest anguish of the lost will be that spectacle of far-off bliss which their impotent envy and malice will not be able to impair. The experience of

moral greatness is like that of the mountain climber who scales the loftiest peaks. The world about him rewards his splendid achievements with coldness and solitude. Mark twain said that to be good is to be lonesome, and it is true so far as the world is concerned. There is plenty of fellowship on the broad road. That narrow path which leads to the skies possesses an atmosphere of isolation. It is never crowded to suffocation; it is never popular, and if you walk in it honestly there will be derogatory estimates of your motives sufficient to make an interesting volume.

We must note, however, that notwithstanding the devil's sneer, no man serves God for naught. The greatest rewards are sure to be his. The divine providence and the divine protection will be a hedge round about him and about all that he hath. On every side are ranged the invisible defenders, and from every sky descend the showers of blessing. But the temporal and visible rewards which sometimes follow are not to be mentioned in the same breath with the invisible and spiritual—the strength of character, the high ideals, the noble purposes, the peace, the integrity, the invincible armor against all stress either of temptation or of adversity. Righteousness pays. Nothing else does pay. He is blind who cannot see the ultimate bankruptcy of unrighteousness. Gerizim and Ebel stand over against each other in every man's life, the one resonant with blessing, the other hoarse with curses. To expect good of any kind to come of an evil course of transgression, of selfishness, of godlessness, is the climax of folly. On the other hand nothing can alienate the rewards of doing right. The nice point comes in the effort to distinguish between doing right for right's sake, or doing it for what follows. It is a point upon which we might expend a good deal of profitable introspection. To do right for the love of right is the highest ideal, and we should not be satisfied to fall short of it. Job should not serve God for five thousand sheep and a thousand camels. Neither should he ask the price of a great reputation. He should serve God because that holy service is the chief delight of his heart. "Delight thyself in the Lord, and he will give thee the desires of thine heart;" but do not delight thyself in the Lord in order that you may be given the desires of thy heart. Distinguish between these separate motives, and be satisfied with none below the highest and noblest.

The devil's imputation of an interested and selfish motive was false in Job's case, and it is false today with respect to thousands who are as thoroughly disinterested and self-sacrificing as was the old patriarch. Is that slum worker seeking the lost in the world's sewers

and gutters, is that missionary who leaves comfort, perhaps luxury behind him and goes among naked savages in deadly fever swamps serving God for his stomach's sake? The imputation is abhorrent because it is palpably false. There are Christlike men and Christlike women in the world of whom the world is not worthy, and we should be profoundly thankful, for in their example and in their victory we see the opening of a door of possibility which pours a flood of dazzling glory from the expanding and triumphant future back upon the twilight of the struggling and half discouraged present.

CRAVING FOR ELOQUENCE

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I wonder if there be many ministers who crave for the name of being eloquent. There seem to be many people who think that preachers wish to be called eloquent, for it is very common to see in newspapers, religious and secular, that certain ministers gave eloquent sermons or addresses on various occasions. One gets positively tired of seeing that word so frequently, and the suspicion is induced that the word "eloquent" is often used for the sake of catering to the conceit of the preacher to whom it is applied, even when it is evident that he lacks much of being really eloquent. It is dangerous to tell some ministers that they are eloquent, even if they possess such a gift, for it is likely to turn their heads away from the true purpose of preaching. Rev. Dr. H. W. Tilden says, "By the time a minister is convinced that he has oratorical powers of a high order he is spoiled for a preacher. His attention is drawn to himself and he is henceforth trying to win praise instead or to transform lives. An insidious pride is apt to change 'the pure emotion of our high devotion into a skin-deep sense of our own eloquence.' . . . The paramount question with the preacher is, 'How much good living have I produced by my preaching?' If my message has not persuaded the sinner to hate his sins and the Christian to love God and righteousness more than he did I have simply obeyed the rules of oratory and tickled the ear of my hearer. Glorious as is the gift of speech we too often toy with it in presenting Christ to men, make it the agent of magnifying ourselves, instead of freighting it with the saving essence of the gospel."

A minister, who is somehow informed that he is elequent, and really believes that he is, needs to have rare common sense and more than an ordinary measure of God's grace to keep him from being spiritually spoiled and officially powerless. It is a blessed thing that the great majority of ministers are not popularly eloquent. Above all things crave for the power to do good.